

I. The Final Story of John the Baptist

A. John 3:22-36 . . . After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He was spending time with them and baptizing. [23] John also was baptizing in Aenon (Ænon – non) near Salim, because there was much water there; and people were coming and were being baptized— [24] for John had not yet been thrown into prison. [25] Therefore there arose a discussion on the part of John's disciples with a Jew about purification. [26] And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified, behold, He is baptizing and all are coming to Him." [27] John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven. [28] You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but, 'I have been sent ahead of Him.' [29] He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. So this joy of mine has been made full. [30] He must increase, but I must decrease. [31] He who comes from above is above all, he who is of the earth is from the earth and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all. [32] What He has seen and heard, of that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony. [33] He who has received His testimony has set his seal to this, that God is true. [34] For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God; for He gives the Spirit without measure. [35] The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand. [36] He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

B. Pray

II. John's final testimony confirms Jesus' divinity and superiority

A. John 3:22-24 . . . After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He was spending time with them and baptizing. [23] John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there; and people were coming and were being baptized— [24] for John had not yet been thrown into prison.

1. These first three verses set the stage for the rest of the story. Jesus and His disciples are in Judea baptizing, while John and his disciples are in Aenon (Ænon – non) baptizing. The fact that both groups were

known to be baptizing at the same time is significant to the rest of the story for two reasons.

2. First, it sets up the discussion about purification between John's disciples and the Jew by bringing together in one area three purification practices – the long standing purification practices of the Jews taught in the Mosaic Law, the new purifying baptism of John the Baptist, and the newest purifying baptism of Jesus.
 3. The second reason it is significant that both groups were baptizing at the same time is that it confirms that baptism did not end with John the Baptist, but rather that just as baptism was an important part of responding to John's message of repentance, so baptism is an important part of responding to Jesus' message of repentance and faith for salvation. This is further confirmed in Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15-16, and Acts 2:38.
- B. John 3:25-26 . . . Therefore (as a result of Jesus and John baptizing new converts) there arose a discussion on the part of John's disciples with a Jew about purification. [26] And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi (teacher), He (Jesus) who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified, behold, He is baptizing and all are coming to Him."
1. The context tells us that the discussion between the Jew and John's disciples was about baptismal purification, and most likely was centered around the question of whose baptism was authentic, or if both were authentic, whose baptism was more authentic and therefore produced better purifying results.
 2. As a result of this discussion, John's disciples return to John and present two observations about Jesus and His baptism – and they are expecting John to give his opinion about them.
 - a. The first observation raised by John's disciples is that Jesus has become a rival to their ministry, and as a rival, He is drawing larger crowds than John, and maybe even drawing people away from John and his ministry.
 - b. The second observation is focused on wondering if Jesus' baptism is equal to the true, purifying baptism that John was administering. In other words, John's disciples are asking if Jesus' baptism is valid? They are wondering if it is able to purify those being baptized in the same complete way as John's baptism?
 3. Interestingly, John does not directly respond to their observations. Instead, he explains the differences between Jesus and himself, and between Jesus' ministry and the work God sent him to do.

- C. John 3:27 . . . John answered and said, “A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven.”
1. John is laying down a principle that is true for those who are directed by God to serve Him in some particular capacity. But this principle is also true for all Christians, because we all are members of the Body of Christ, and as members, we share in the responsibilities necessary to keep the church functioning as a Body.
 - a. The essence of the principle is this: It is God who assigns the task we are to do and the position from which it is to be done. And it is God who gives us the ability – or the spiritual gift – and the empowerment to do the task. Finally, God is the one who decides who is subordinate to whom.
 - b. Without any question, John the Baptist is speaking of the tasks and the power to do those tasks that God gave Jesus and himself to do. However, this principle also applies to all Christians.
 - c. For example, in writing to the Christians in Rome, Paul said, “For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith” (Romans 12:3). In other words, upon discerning the task God assigned and the position from which you are to fulfill the task – be it a leadership position or a more subordinate position – humbly fulfill your God-given task within the boundaries set by God for doing the task.
 - d. Paul affirms that he himself lived by this principle when he said, “It is by the grace of God (not self-appointment) that I am what I am (an apostle), and [God’s] grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored (in providing my own financial support) even more than all of them (the other apostles), yet not I, but the grace (gifting and empowerment) of God with me” (1 Corinthians 15:10).
 2. So why is this important for us today? I believe this is important because Christian service is for God’s sake and the benefit of the church, not for our sake or for the benefit of our ego or pride or financial enrichment.
 - a. In other words, Christian service is God using us for His sake, not us using God and the church for our sake. It isn’t what we can get out of serving God, but what He and the Body of Christ can gain from our service.
 - b. Therefore, for the true servant of Jesus Christ, it makes no difference if they are a leader or a follower, up front or serving

in some obscure way, making important decisions or submitting to those in authority, the head of the denomination or the one who cleans the toilets. What is important to the true servant of Jesus Christ is that he is serving in the way God asks him to serve.

- D. The next thing John does is confirm that he has already told his disciples that he is not the important one – he is not the Messiah – but rather he is just a preparer of the way who has preceded the important one.
1. And so we read in vs 28 . . . You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but, 'I have been sent ahead of Him.'
 2. Then John uses a picture of a bride and groom to emphasize the truth of what he just said.
- E. John 3:29-30 . . . He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. So this joy of mine has been made full. [30] He must increase, but I must decrease.
1. He who has the bride is the bridegroom – Jesus is the bridegroom and those following him, which today includes the church universal, are His bride.
 - a. In other words, John is telling his disciples that if folks are flocking to Jesus, it because He is the groom, and it is only natural for the bride to want to be with the groom. Therefore, what appears to be a questionable change to John's disciples is really what is supposed to take place.
 - b. Now you may be wondering how this applies to us today. Too often, Christians act as if their pastor or their church or their denomination or their home-group or their theology is the groom.
 - (1) And when we think this way, we then tend to believe that to be a true Christian or to be a spiritual Christian, you must be part of our denomination, or come to our church, or follow our teaching, or hold to our theology.
 - (2) Of course, this is pride acting as if we are the groom and the bride belongs to us and should come to us. But the truth is, Jesus is the groom, and the bride belongs to Him. We are not the focus. He is the focus. Therefore, our role is to point whoever will listen to Jesus Christ.
 2. but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice –

- a. John is making it clear that he is NOT THE GROOM, but only the friend of the groom.
- b. And as the groom's friend, he finds great joy in hearing that Jesus is teaching and baptizing, and that crowds are gathering around Him – because Jesus is the groom and the bride belongs to Him.
3. So this joy of mine has been made full – In other words, there is no more joy to gain, for the grooms arrival is the fulfillment of all the joy expected from being a friend of the groom.
 - a. Sadly, because of our flesh, or we might better say, our pride, some of us are only filled with joy when we are in an exalted position or counted among those in leadership. Some of us find joy only when people look up to us, respect us, seek out our advice, and live according to our words of wisdom. And then there are those who are not content with just a following, their joy is only made full when they have a huge following.
 - b. John was not this way. He knew what God had given him to do, and he did it. He did not push for bigger and better. And though he was once the popular one – and rightly so – he did not complain or get upset when Jesus started drawing bigger crowds. Why? Because John was not in this for himself, but for God's sake. John was not serving his ego or pride, or seeking power or financial gain. He was serving the Savior and all those who would one day repent, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and be born again.
4. Therefore, John went on to say, “He must increase, but I must decrease” – In other words, there must be a shift in focus from John as the important one to Jesus. Why? Because Jesus is the important one, and He is to be seen by the people as the important one. Whereas John must become less important – then he used to be – in the people's eyes. Why? So as not to detract from Jesus' preeminence.
5. Next, John explains why Jesus is the preeminent one – and in doing so he affirms once again that Jesus, though human, is also divine.

F. John 3:31-34. . . He who comes from above is above all, he who is of the earth is from the earth and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all. [32] What He has seen and heard, of that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony. [33] He who has received His testimony has set his seal to this, that God is true. [34] For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God; for He gives the Spirit without measure.

1. He who comes from above is above all, he who is of the earth is from the earth and speaks of the earth.

- a. With these words, John the Baptist is confirming that Jesus came from heaven and is therefore both human and divine, while he, John, came from the earth and is therefore only human.
 - b. Since Jesus is from heaven and John the Baptist is from the earth, by nature, Jesus is superior to John. In fact, Jesus is superior to Moses, the Jewish High Priest, the Sanhedrin, the Pharisees, and the Sadducees. And Jesus is superior to you and to me.
 - c. One of the changes that ought to take place when we repent and come to faith in Christ is a change from pride to humility, that is, from thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought, to realizing we are hardly important compared to God and His son, Jesus Christ. The gospel of salvation ought to drive us toward a deep sense of unworthiness, and growth in the Christian life ought to drive us toward considering others as more important than ourselves. If this is not the case, beware, because something is drastically wrong.
2. He who comes from heaven is above all. What He has seen and heard, of that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony.
- a. The phrase “no one receives His testimony” presents us with one of the difficulties of scripture. Sometimes the Bible exaggerates, and rather than seeking to understand the truth it is conveying, we tend to quibble over the exaggeration, or misuse it.
 - b. In this case, however, the exaggeration is followed by a clarifying or moderating statement (see vs 33). But even if it wasn't, we know that John – who wrote this gospel, the other disciples, the 120 who were in the upper room (Acts 1:15), and the 500 to whom Jesus appeared following His resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:6), all received Jesus' testimony – that is, they all believed Jesus was the Messiah and that His teaching was true.
 - c. And so it is not that NO ONE received His testimony, but rather that so few did it was as if no one did.
 - d. Therefore, I am urging you avoid getting hung up on an apparent exaggeration in scripture, but rather seek to understand the truth, or the principle, or the message that is being conveyed.
3. He who has received [Jesus'] testimony has set his seal to this, that God is true. When we respond with repentance and faith to the gospel message, and then move on from there to live a godly life, we are confirming – by becoming a new creation in Jesus Christ – that God is real and His word is true. The transformed life is public proof that God exists, His word is true, and His ways work.

4. For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God; for He gives the Spirit without measure.
 - a. The first half of this statement is clear. The second half, not so clear. Is John speaking of Jesus giving the Holy Spirit without measure, or is it God having given Jesus the Spirit without measure?
 - b. We cannot be sure which it is, yet either way, the main points remain – Jesus is both human and divine; He came from above; and He is superior to John the Baptist – and all the rest of us.
- G. John 3:35 . . . The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand. We will look at this topic when we get to chapter 14.
- H. John 3:36 . . . He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."
 1. In his final statement, John the Baptist ties believing in Jesus Christ with eternal life and disobeying Jesus Christ with eternal damnation. And in doing this, he ties faith with obedience and unbelief with disobedience.
 2. This makes perfect sense, when one considers that Jesus Christ is both the supreme authority (Lord) over all humanity and the only savior able to save sinners from the consequences of their sin.
 3. Therefore, to believe in Jesus includes submitting to His authority over you to the point of obeying His commands and fulfilling His will, just as believing in Jesus includes trusting in His redeeming work to save you from the penalty of sin.
 - a. And though you may think these are two sides of the same coin, you cannot have the salvation side without the obedience side, and you cannot have the obedience side without God graciously giving you the salvation side (Romans 2:13; James 1:22).
 - b. In a similar way, to reject either side is to reject the whole, which is why John the Baptist says that those who do not obey the Son will not see life, but instead will remain under God's wrath.
 4. Hebrews 3:12-19 and James 2:14-26 also tie faith to obedience.

III. Conclusion

- A. When we walk with the Lord in the light of His Word, what a glory He sheds on our way! While we do His good will, He abides with us still, and with all who will trust and obey. Trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.